

STORE IMAGE: TOWARD A CONCEPTUAL MODEL PART 1

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ABSTRACT

The lack of a universal definition and conceptual model of store image guided the aims for this research, namely to 1) delineate the underlying structure of the store image construct; 2) formulate a definition of store image; and 3) develop a model of the underlying theoretical structure of store image. An in-depth literature review was done to specify the domain and to delineate the underlying structure of this construct. The knowledge gained was incorporated into the model of apparel store image that served as point of departure for the development of a scale to measure the importance of apparel store image dimensions.

Keywords: store image, dimensions, apparel, conceptual model, multi-dimensional

This article is the first in a series of three focussing on the multi-dimensional nature of the store image and the complexity of measuring this construct. Although the literature cited is generic, apparel store image was central to the investigation. The theoretical underpinnings of store image are discussed in Part 1 followed by an overview of scale development in Part 2. Part 3 reports the empirical testing of the Apparel Store Image Scale.

What is store image? This question has been the focus of various research endeavours. Martineau (1958, p. 47), in his seminal study on store image, first defined store image as "...the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes". Lindquist (1974–1975, p. 31) concluded that store image is "...complex by nature and consists of a combination of tangible or functional factors and intangible or psychological factors that a consumer perceives to be present". According to the literature most definitions stress that store image is the consumer's perception of a store, based on a set of salient attributes (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998; Faircloth, Capella & Alford, 2001; James, Durand & Dreves, 1976; Jin & Kim, 2003; Osman, 1993). However, researchers contend that the definition of store image is more than the factual description of characteristics; it also describes the interaction among characteristics (Amirani & Gates, 1993; Dichter, 1985; Oxenfeldt, 1974–1975). Zimmer and Golden (1988) as well as Keaveney and Hunt (1992) referred to the gestalt nature of the store image construct. The term *gestalt* is defined as "...the idea that the individual's perception of any object incorporates innumerable bits of separate information that are combined in such a manner that the end result of the integration of inputs amounts to more than the sum of its constituent parts" (Chowdhary, Reardon & Srivastava, 1998, p. 73).

Why is store image important? The contextualisation of store image within the scope of corporate personality, corporate identity and corporate image has been reported extensively by scholars such as Kennedy (1977), Dowling (1986), Abratt (1989), Markwick and Fill (1997), Varley (2005) and Stuart (1999). The broad context of corporate branding was established by investigating the interplay between corporate strategy, culture, identity and image as reported in Visser, Du Preez and Janse

van Noordwyk (2006). The relevance of store image within this context, and more specifically the context of the retail store brand, was discussed. Visser *et al.* (2006, p. 51) proposed an integrated model of store choice and retail marketing strategy by adapting Monroe and Guiltinan's model of store choice (in Assael, 1992, p. 630) and combining it with Davidson, Sweeney and Stampfl's model (in Terblanché, 1998, p. 106). This proposed model positions store image as a critical variable in apparel store choice. It also indicates the interaction between the uncontrollable and controllable consumer needs and the position of retailing in the market as well as in the integrated marketing strategy. Against this broad background the construct of store image was further investigated in order to specify the domain and to delineate the underlying structure thereof.

It is evident that a universal and generally accepted definition of store image (pertaining to specifically the dimensions of store image) is still lacking. Academic debates concerning the theoretical underpinnings of store image further complicate matters (Chowdhary *et al.*, 1998). If researchers employ different definitions of a construct, comparison and accumulation of research findings are hampered, resulting in an inability to develop syntheses of existing knowledge and to develop scientifically sound measuring instruments. These are prerequisites for driving research and advancing theory building (DeVellis, 2003; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006; Netemeyer, Bearden & Sharma, 2003). There is little evidence of these issues in store image research. The overall objectives of this article series focus on the definition of store image, the development of a measurement scale and the testing thereof in an apparel retail environment.

The aims of this paper are to

- specify the store image domain from existing store image literature;
- develop a conceptual model of store image and related consumer behaviour variables;
- delineate the underlying structure (dimensions and subdimensions) of the store image construct;
- formulate a definition of store image; and
- develop a model of the underlying theoretical structure of apparel store image.

STORE IMAGE DOMAIN SPECIFICATION

To specify the domain of store image, consumer behaviour variables in store image research were identified. Firstly, consumer behaviour variables employed as independent variables in store image research will be highlighted. Secondly, a summary will be given of research in which the relationship between store image perception and dependent consumer behaviour variables was investigated. This section spans empirical research of more than three decades but does not profess to be inclusive of all related literature.

Results from studies on the relationship between **demographic variables** (age, gender, level of education, occupation, residence, income level, marital status and number of children) and perceived store image were marked by contradicting findings (Chowdhary, 1999; Gehrt & Yan, 2004; Hyllegard, Eckman, Descals & Borja, 2005; Moye & Giddings, 2002; Oates, Shufeldt & Vaught, 1996; Odekerken-Schröder, De Wulf, Kasper, Kleijnen, Hoekstra & Commandeur, 2001; Paulins & Geistfeld,

2003; Williams & Slama, 1995). Consequently no definitive conclusions can be drawn about the influence of demographic variables on the perceived importance of store image.

Initial support for the relationship between store image perception and lifestyle as a **psychographic variable** has been found, whether directly or indirectly. Shim and Kotsiopoulos (1992) indicated that shopping orientations act as mediator in the relationship between lifestyle and store image perception. The relationship between store image and other psychographic variables (i.e. environmental disposition and values), however, was only supported by isolated findings (Erdem, Oumlil & Tuncalp, 1999; Grossbart, Hampton, Rammohan & Lapidus, 1990).

Only a few studies investigated the influence of **socio-cultural variables** (family life cycle, social class, subculture and specifically culture) on store image. Two studies suggested a relationship between culture and the perceived importance of store image. Differences in ethnicity (Kim & Han, 2000) and

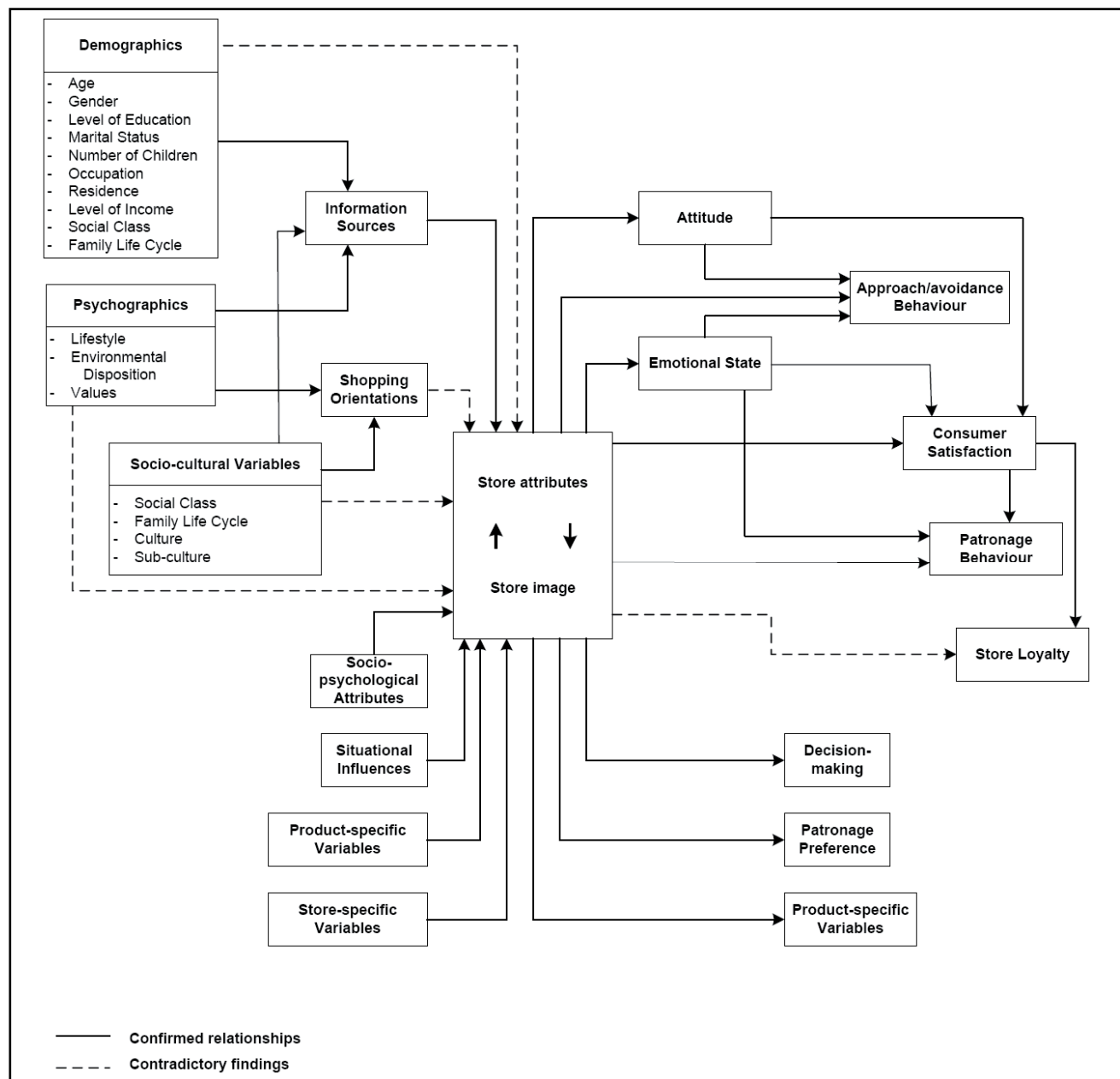


FIGURE 1
Proposed conceptual theoretical model of store image and related consumer behaviour variables

root culture (Van de Velde, Pelton, Turnbull Caton & Byrne, 1996) were reported. Shim and Kotsiopoulos (1992) found that socio-cultural variables had an indirect relationship with store image perception mediated by shopping orientation. Contrary to Janse van Noordwyk (2002) who reported differences between subcultural groups based on population group and their perceptions of store image, Gehrt and Yan (2004) indicated that ethnicity did not influence the perceived importance of retail attributes.

The relationship between **socio-psychological variables** (especially self-image and body cathexis) and perceived store image was investigated. Shim, Kotsiopoulos and Knoll (1990) found that men with different body types varied regarding their satisfaction with store attributes. Other researchers (Graeff 1996; Quester, Karunaratna & Goh, 2000; Hogg, Cox & Keeling, 2000; Jamal & Goode, 2001; Thompson & Chen, 1998) identified a positive relationship between self-image, brand image and brand perceptions, which can be applied to the perceptions of store image. Graeff (1996) stated that self-image and brand image congruence serves as an evaluative criterion in the attitude towards a brand. The results from these studies provide unequivocal support for the importance of self-image congruence with store image.

Studies provided initial support for a relationship between **information sources** and store image perception (Faircloth *et al.*, 2001; Jin & Kim, 2003; Kliatchko, 2005; Osman, 1993; Shim & Kotsiopoulos, 1992; Williams & Slama, 1995). Similarly, support was found for the relationship between **situational influences** (e.g. gift shopping, time pressure, urgent purchases and usage situations) and the perception of store image (Gehrt & Yan, 2004; Mattson, 1982; Moye & Kincade, 2002; Van Kenhove, De Wulf & Van Waterschoot, 1999). However, the specific situational influence variables included within each study differed significantly.

The relationship between **shopping orientation** and store image perception was more conclusive although the shopping orientation groups that were identified in specific studies differed (Morschett, Swoboda & Foscht, 2005; Moye & Giddings, 2002; Moye & Kincade, 2002; Shim & Kotsiopoulos, 1992; Visser & Du Preez, 2001). The results of Shim and Kotsiopoulos (1992) indicated that shopping orientations predict the importance of store attributes. In contrast, Morschett *et al.* (2005) found that consumers' shopping motives did not impact on their perception of store attributes. Results indicated that shopping motives had an impact on consumers' attitudes towards retailers. Consistent support was found for the relationship between store image perception and **product-specific variables** (Amine & Cadenat, 2003; Porter & Claycomb, 1997; Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003) as well as **store-specific variables** (Joyce & Lambert, 1996; Mitchell & Kiral, 1998; Moore & Carpenter, 2006; Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003; Solgaard & Hansen, 2003; Shim & Kotsiopoulos, 1992). Research on product-specific variables refers to brand image and label brand quality while store-specific variables refer to store type.

Various studies reported relationships between dependent consumer behaviour variables and store image perception. Results from these studies are less contradictory. Although only a few studies investigated the relationship between store image perception and **attitude** (Ajzen, 1988; Ajzen & Fishbein, 2004) and **emotional state** (Grace & O'Cass, 2005; Solomon, 2002), results are indicative of the influence of store image perception on these variables. Research provides evidence of the relationship between perceived store image and **decision making**, although the types of decision vary greatly (Faircloth, *et al.*, 2001; Jin & Kim, 2003; Osman, 1993; Ward, Bitner & Barnes, 1992). Strong support was found for the relationship between store image perception and both **patronage preference**

(Amirani & Gates, 1993; Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003; Thang & Tan, 2003) and approach/avoidance behaviour. However, research indicated that in some instances the relationship between store image perception and **approach/avoidance behaviour** was mediated by emotional state (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Moye & Giddings, 2002; Ward *et al.*, 1992).

Support was found for the influence of perceived store image on **patronage behaviour** (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal & Voss, 2002; Grace & O'Cass, 2005; Newberry, Klemz & Boshoff, 2003) as well as on **store satisfaction** (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998; Gómez, McLaughlin & Wittink, 2003; Koo, 2003; Miranda, Kónja & Havrila, 2005). Research on the relationship between perceived store image and store loyalty concluded with contradicting findings. Chang and Tu (2005), Koo (2003) and Miranda *et al.* (2005) reported a direct positive relationship between store image perception and **store loyalty**. Only partial support for this relationship was found by Odekerken-Schröder *et al.* (2001) whereas Bloemer and De Ruyter's (1998) study found an indirect positive relationship. Lastly, the influence of store image perception on **product-specific variables** was supported, although the specific attributes included in the literature varied (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003; Semeijn, Van Riel & Ambrosini, 2003; Stern, Zinkhan & Jaju, 2001; Varley, 2005).

The knowledge gained from this review of research was amalgamated into a conceptual theoretical model (see Figure 1) delineating proposed relationships between store image and related consumer behaviour variables. Central to this model is the interaction between store attributes and store image, where store image formation is based on consumers' perceptions of all the attributes associated with a store (Faircloth *et al.*, 2001; Jin & Kim, 2003; Osman, 1993). The model further delineates the influence of consumer behaviour and related variables on

TABLE 1
Store image dimensions identified from the literature

DIMENSION	DIMENSION NAMES INCLUDED FROM LITERATURE
Atmosphere	Activity dimension; Clean and spacious atmosphere; Music/aesthetics dimension; Store atmosphere; Store atmosphere – aural; Store atmosphere – olfactory; Store atmosphere – tactile; Store atmosphere – visual
Convenience	Accessibility; Congestion; Convenience; Convenience (economic); Convenience – store location and mobility; Convenient facilities; Errand shopping; Facility convenience; In-store convenience and physical environment; Leisure activities; Location; Location and convenience; Price; Promotions/convenience; Proximity and familiarity; Service convenience; Variety under one roof
Facilities	Appearance; Congestion; Convenient facilities; Facilities; Facility convenience; Family shopping; Outside attractiveness; Physical facilities; Sensory/layout dimension; Servicescape; Service – store facilities; Store layout
Institutional	Clientele; Institutional; Institutional factors
Merchandise	Brand name; Fabric; Fashionability; Fashion goods; Focused shopping; Merchandise; Merchandise value; Merchandise variety; Merchandising; Popularity; Price; Price and quality aspects; Price competitiveness; Price/quality dimensions; Products; Quality/reputation; Rich mix of commodities and services; Status; Technical quality; Time/availability; Value; Value-added service
Promotion	Advertising; Interest shopping; Promotion; Promotions; Promotions/convenience; Sales and incentives
Sales personnel	Employee service; Functional quality; Personal interaction; Personnel; Preference for salespeople; Relational quality; Salesmanship; Salespeople service; Salesperson/service; Service – sales associates attributes
Service	After-sales service; Complaint handling; Core service; Credit; Credit facilities; Employee service; In-store service; Merchandise; Merchandise requests; Post-transaction service; Presence of related services; Rich mix of commodities and services; Salespeople service; Salesperson service; Service; Service convenience; Services; Service – sales associates attributes; Service – store amenities; Service – store facilities; Value-added service; Various store services

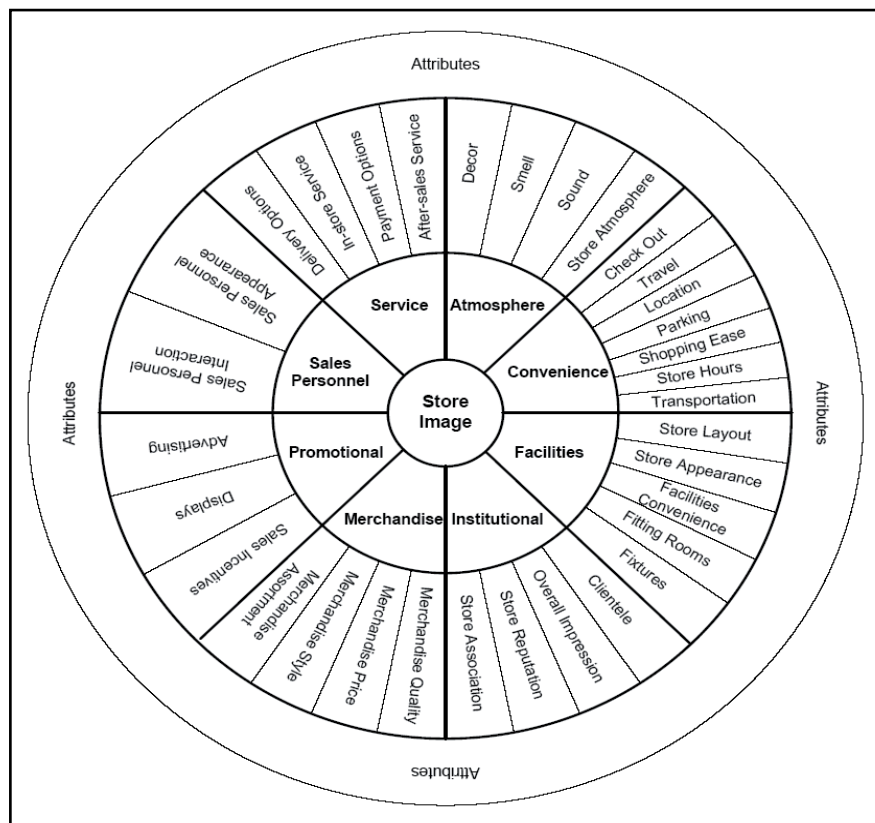


FIGURE 2
Proposed conceptual model of the underlying structure of store image

store image. Relationships that were supported by research findings are indicated with a solid line. Where results reported contradictory findings the relationships are presented by a broken line.

UNDERLYING STRUCTURE OF STORE IMAGE: DIMENSIONS AND SUBDIMENSIONS

Store image literature yielded a significant number of researchers who presented their view of the underlying structure (dimensions and subdimensions) of store image. However, it is evident that they did not consistently employ a similar underlying structure. The lack of a clear definition of store image is, therefore, further exacerbated by the absence of consensus on a set of universal store image dimensions (Amirani & Gates, 1993; Burns, 1992). Those researchers who reported dimensions and subdimensions for store image employed various research methodologies to arrive at these structures, namely

- review of the literature (Cary & Zylla, 1981; Grace & O'Cass, 2005; Ko & Kincade, 1997; Koo, 2003; Kotler, 1973–1974; Lumpkin, Greenberg & Goldstucker, 1985; Manolis, Keep, Joyce & Lambert, 1994; Odekerken-Schröder *et al.*, 2001; Thang & Tan, 2003; Terblanché & Boshoff, 2004; Wong & Yu, 2003);
- qualitative research (Janse van Noordwyk, 2002; Lee & Johnson, 1997; Visser *et al.*, 2006; Zimmer & Golden, 1988);
- quantitative research with the application of exploratory factor analysis (Bellenger, Robertson & Greenberg, 1977; Bellizzi, Crowley & Hasty, 1983; Chowdhary, 1999; Erdem *et al.*, 1999; Huddleston, Ford & Mahoney, 1990; Kim & Jin, 2001; Marks, 1976; Moye & Kincade, 2002; Sullivan, Savitt, Zheng & Cui, 2002); and
- multiple discriminant analysis (Wong & Teas, 2001).

For the purposes of this study it was imperative to take cognisance of the findings of these researchers. The process of identifying store image dimensions included several distinct phases. Firstly, store image dimensions were identified from literature, and secondly, these dimensions were refined to arrive at a final set of dimensions underpinning store image. This first phase employed a systematic process with several distinct stages that enabled the researchers to integrate the literature into a final set of store image dimensions, namely

- compiling a composite list of dimensions from the literature;
- identifying emerging dimensions;
- compiling a composite list of the subdimensions included within each dimension;
- grouping isolated dimensions with the identified dimensions based on a comparison of subdimensions; and
- compiling a set of dimensions to be subjected to refinement to arrive at a final set of dimensions.

After compiling a composite list of all store image dimensions (stage 1), the list was scrutinised to identify those dimensions that were supported by different researchers. The names attributed to the dimensions in each study served as guideline for identification. Nineteen dimensions emerged, namely Age, Atmosphere, Clientele, Convenience, Credit, Environment, Facilities, Institutional, Layout, Location, Merchandise, Post-transaction, Price, Promotional, Quality, Reputation, Sales personnel, Service and Value. These dimensions were refined to

- ensure that dimensions are grouped together appropriately;
- address any overlap between dimensions;
- eliminate any redundant dimensions; and
- determine the relevancy of the dimensions within the current study.

TABLE 2
Store image subdimensions identified from the literature

IDENTIFIED DIMENSIONS	IDENTIFIED SUBDIMENSIONS	IDENTIFIED SUBDIMENSIONS FROM LITERATURE	AUTHORS*
Atmosphere	Décor	Colours; Décor; Neatness	Baker et al., 2002; Miranda et al., 2005
	Smell	Smell	Bosmans, 2006; Orth & Bourrain, 2005
	Sound	Sound	Sweeney & Wyber, 2002
	Store atmosphere	Size; Store atmosphere	Koo, 2003; Thang & Tan, 2003
Convenience	Check-out	Check-out	Bielen & Demoulin, 2007
	Travel	Duration of travel; Ease of travel	brahim, 2002; Jin & Kim, 2003
	Location	Enclosed mall; Location; Location close to home; Location close to work; Location near other clothing stores; Location near a variety of other stores/facilities; Smoking policy	Miranda et al., 2005
	Parking	Parking	Stoltman et al., 1999
	Shopping ease	Convenience; Labels/tags; Package carryout; Phone cards; Shopping ease; Store accessibility; Store familiarity; Strong carry bags; Not crowded	De Klerk & Ampousah, 2000; Jin & Kim, 2003
	Store hours	Store hours	Kaufman & Lane, 1996
	Transportation	Transportation	brahim, 2002; Jin & Kim, 2003
Facilities	Store layout	Aisle placement; Spaciousness; Store layout	Groeppel-Klein & Bartman, 2007; Semeijn et al., 2003; Miranda et al., 2005
	Store appearance	Clean store; Entrance/exit; Outside appearance; Store maintenance	Richardson et al., 1996; Siu & Cheung, 2001
	Facilities convenience	Family shopping; Refreshment within store; Rest area; Washrooms	Kerfoot et al., 2003; Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003
	Fitting rooms	Fitting rooms	Kerfoot et al., 2003; Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003
	Fixtures	Floor covering; Hangers; Information boards; Lighting; Mirrors; Physical facilities; Temperature	Kerfoot et al., 2003; Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003
Institutional	Clientele	Clientele; Communication; Discrimination; Friend association; Sales personnel – clientele; Social class	Amirani & Gates, 1993; Harris et al., 2000
	Overall impression	Overall impression	Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Alessandri, 2001
	Store reputation	Store reputation	Alessandri, 2001; Harris & De Chernatony, 2001
	Store association	Attractive service materials; Can identify with store; Self-image; Store name	Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Harris & De Chernatony, 2001
Merchandise	Merchandise assortment	Labels/brands; Merchandise assortment; Merchandise availability; Seasonal changes not too early; Unique merchandise; Variety within store	Koo, 2003; Thang & Tan, 2003
	Merchandise style	Appropriate merchandise; Merchandise fashion; Specialised merchandise	Taylor & Cosenza, 2002
	Merchandise price	Merchandise price; Merchandise value	Moore & Carpenter, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2002
	Merchandise quality	Dependable merchandise; Merchandise quality; Store quality	Babakus et al., 2004; Verma & Gupta, 2004
Promotion	Advertising	Promotion; Advertising; Personal contact; Realistic models	Carroll et al., 2007; DuFrene et al., 2005
	Displays	Displays	Sen et al., 2002
	Sales incentives	Sales; Incentives; Special events	Dawes, 2004; Alvarez & Casielles, 2005
Sales personnel	Sales personnel interaction	Attention from sales personnel; Caring sales personnel; Competent sales personnel; Courteous sales personnel; Friendly sales personnel; Helpful sales personnel; Knowledgeable sales personnel; Professional sales personnel; Sales personnel; Social interaction; Trust sales personnel; Unobtrusive sales personnel	Baker et al., 2002; Grace & O'Cass, 2005; Hu & Jasper, 2006
	Sales personnel appearance	Appearance of sales personnel; Sales personnel similar to yourself; Sales personnel your age; Sales personnel your gender	De Klerk et al., 1993
Service	After-sales service	Alterations; Complaint handling; Post-transaction satisfaction; Return policy	Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003; Stauss, 2002
	Payment options	Bank card; Credit; Layaway; Payment options; Store card	Huddleston et al., 1990; Park & Burns, 2005
	In-store service	Appro facilities; Gift wrapping; Inter-store transfers; Number of sales personnel; Packaging; Sales personnel advice; Sales personnel service; Self-service; Service; Trolley/basket	Thang & Tan, 2003; Teller et al., 2006
	Delivery options	Delivery options; Phone orders	Thang & Tan, 2003

* Only some of the most recent authors are listed here

This refining exercise resulted in the 19 dimensions being scaled down to eight dimensions as depicted in Table 1.

Similar to the diversity in dimensions underlying store image, the subdimensions mentioned in the literature are also much

varied. A composite list of subdimensions included within each dimension was compiled from the reviewed studies. The subdimensions were grouped together on the basis of name similarity and frequency of mentions recorded. However, the need to further refine the subdimensions for inclusion in a model

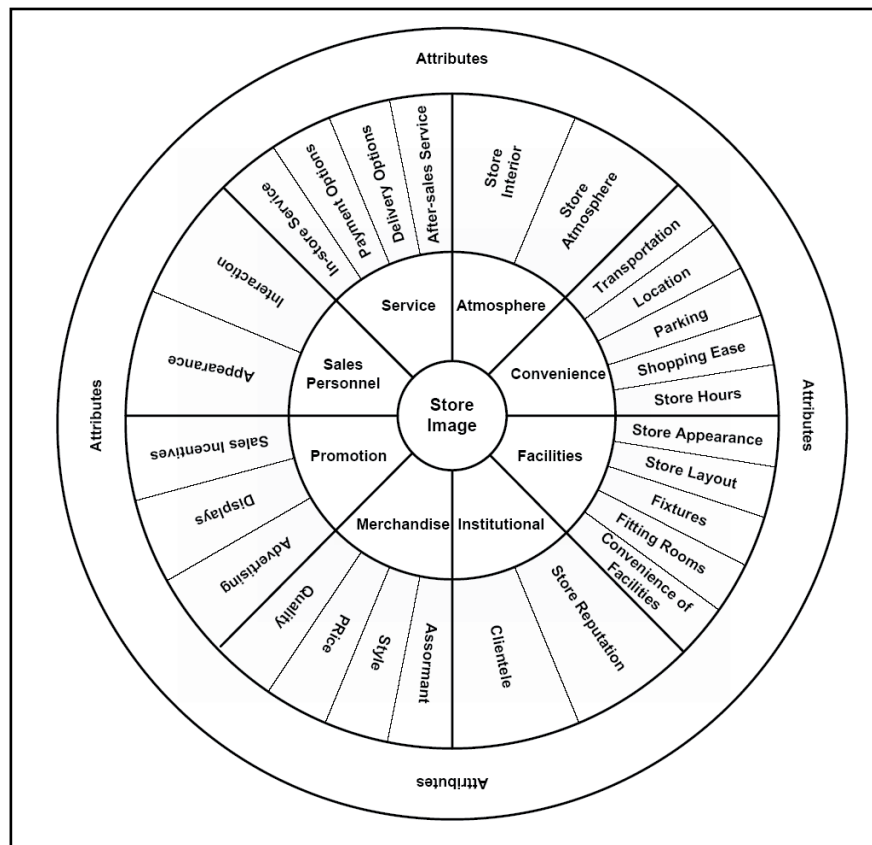


FIGURE 3
Model of apparel store image

of the underlying structure of store image became evident. The possible overlap between subdimensions (within dimensions), the relevancy of each subdimension as well as the grouping of the final list of subdimensions was critically assessed. Table 2 depicts the dimensions and subdimensions identified as well as subdimensions referred to by various authors.

The multiplicity of consumer variables related to store image (refer to Figure 1), as well as the wide array of store attributes and subdimensions condensed into dimensions (refer to Table 2) are but some of the issues that should urge researchers to conduct investigations into store image with circumspection. Any endeavour to propose a definition and model of the underlying theoretical structure of store image should take cognisance of not only these issues but especially the gestalt nature of store image.

CONCLUSION: PROPOSED MODEL AND DEFINITION OF STORE IMAGE

In the proposed model, the four concentric circles represent a mutual influence on each other. Central to the model is store image. The eight dimensions underpinning the construct are represented in the first concentric circle, followed by the subdimensions underlying each dimension. The outer concentric circle of the model constitutes the specific store attributes underlying the identified subdimensions and dimensions. The perception of these store attributes is integral to store image formation. The size and components of each circle are not related to the importance of the specific dimension or subdimension. This model serves to delineate the underlying structure of the store image construct and should be implemented as a starting point when developing instruments to measure store image.

The proposed conceptual model of the underlying theoretical structure of store image was submitted for expert judging to further enhance the accuracy and comprehensiveness thereof. Firstly, the model was considered at a special advisory session with two experts in the field of store image and consumer behaviour. Since the model was used as a point of departure for item generation and the subsequent development of a store image scale (refer to Part 2 of this series), it was imperative to ensure that the model represented a logical and practical framework. The review of the model was done in conjunction with a review of the initial item pool. From the feedback of this session, several adaptations were made to the model, specifically to the wording, ordering and grouping of the subdimensions within each dimension. Secondly, the model was submitted to a panel of experts from different but related fields of study, all of whom were familiar with the research problem, study objectives and scale development (three PhD holders and one advanced PhD candidate). From the feedback one change was effected, namely the grouping of *Smell* and *Sound* under the subdimension *Store interior* within the *Atmosphere* dimension.

The revised model is presented in Figure 3 (from here onwards referred to as the *model of apparel store image*).

Due to the nature and scope of store image, the formulation of a succinct definition is extremely difficult. The risk remains that important facets and nuances could be omitted resulting in a deficient definition. Thus,

store image is defined as a complex, multidimensional construct based on the perception of tangible and intangible store attributes associated with eight dimensions, namely Atmosphere, Convenience, Facilities, Institutional, Merchandise, Promotion, Sales personnel and Service. These dimensions are further delineated into subdimensions that are underpinned by specific store attributes. Store image has a gestalt nature that is represented by the interaction

between the salient tangible and intangible store attributes. The formation of store image relies on the perception of a store, which varies by retailer, product and target market. By implication, store image is influenced by (1) the consumer's perception of a set of salient store attributes; (2) the importance the consumer places on the various store image dimensions, subdimensions and the associated store attributes; as well as (3) the retailer's manipulation of these store attributes through strategic management.

Store image is a complex construct. The investigation of existing literature reported in this article culminated in a proposed model and comprehensive definition of store image that could be refined and tested further. This definition and the proposed model of apparel store image served as the point of departure for the next phases in the scale development process that will be reported in parts 2 and 3 of this article series.

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